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Learn, Apply Cuba's Lessons

Last weekend, after the abortive "invasion" of Cuba by anti-Castro forces who had entirely too much of the "too little, too late" in their attempt, President Kennedy spoke to the American Society of Newspaper Editors gathered in Washington. He told the group that: "There are from this useful lessons. It is clear that the forces of communism are not to be underestimated in Cuba or anywhere else in the world."

There were many lessons to be learned and probably there are a good many more. It is evident that Castro was better prepared for this return of those who had fled Cuba under his repressions and brutality than either the exiles, their intelligence and U. S. Intelligence had believed possible. One of the first lessons is that our intelligence must be surer of its information in future. The President says that the forces of communism are not to be underestimated anywhere in the world but they were certainly underestimated in Cuba. President Kennedy has recognized that in his call for top-level study of the nation's intelligence agencies and of our "limited war" capabilities.

Perhaps the CIA had been misled by the Castro revolution which won Cuba away from the leadership of Fulgencio Batista. That revolution had started with apparently little more back of it than revulsion against Batista. It was spurred into flame by promises of land reform by Dr. Castro and other incentives which always appeal to hungry people. But people—a whole host of them—still are hungry in Cuba. Moreover, it is now known—if it was not fully known before—that the Reds, both Russian and Chinese, had been pouring materiel and techniques into Cuba to build a force strong militarily and in psychological readiness for repelling an attack. Against all this the expatriates threw a force of far too few men and too little military muscle. We know the result. And we realize now the propaganda advantage it has given the Soviets all over the world. They have made this failure a failure of the United States and an evidence of its lack of power to help its friends effectively

and to so appeal to the masses that they will rise against an oppressor.

Here is a lesson, reduced to its simplest terms, that you can't beat something with nothing. There was not only too little military muscle but far too little preparation for getting backing from the people—by defections from the Castro forces—to meet the need. A victory by the invading forces on the beach could have set off a chain of defections. A defeat would certainly not do that—better that such defecting people save themselves to fight another day than be mowed down by Castro's anti-invasion forces in action or—as prisoners—fall before Castro's trigger-happy firing squads which were well armed by Russia. Moreover, the people of Cuba are not all devotees of freedom. They were not offered by the invaders a pattern of things to come when Castro falls—as almost assuredly he will. There needs to be the image of a popular liberator held before the Cubans and a better image than Castro created in the days before he took over. There must be greater incentive to Cubans than just fighting communism.

What's more, the United States has been committed to a role in this business that hurts. We are trying to gain a consensus among the Latin American states to fight communism in Cuba and ourselves keep out of it directly. Why should we assume such a stance? The thinking Cubans have reason to rely on us for deliverance. We delivered them from Spain in a costly war. We have helped their economy. We have been their friends. Our Monroe Doctrine helps to defend them but to the average Cuban it must seem an academic thing just now.

In short, we need to be playing our hand with enough power to drive out communism from Cuba. We have full justification for doing so in our own interest and that of our neighbors. And in so doing we will do much to stymie Khrushchev. He is playing his hand to the maximum. Weak efforts will not stop him. Strong ones we may assume, will. They have done so in the past in other places.